"He saves himself, if at all, by bringing the community around to right reason."

Richard Weaver: A Southern Agrarian at the University of Chicago

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TO IDENTIFY RICHARD WEAVER with the University of Chicago and Southern Agrarianism provides a reasonably accurate approximation of the influences that determined his view of the world and the character of his work. He was born in 1910 in Weaverville, North Carolina, of a closely knit, substantial family, the first Weaver ancestor having come into the region in the 1790s when it was still a wilderness. A family history published in 1962 includes two talks given in 1950 and 1954 at the annual family gatherings by the member of the family who had become a professor at the University of Chicago. In his 1950 talk he "looks at Weaverville and the Weaver community," as he put it, "through a perspective of Chicago." He goes on to say:

> I have been condemned for the past six years to earn my living in that most brutal of cities, a place where all the vices of urban and industrial society break forth in a kind of evil flower. I sometimes think of the university to which I am attached as a missionary outpost in darkest Chicago. There we labor as we can to convert the heathen, without much reward of success.

His 1954 talk, by way of contrast, is a tribute to his uncle, Ethan Douglas Weaver, who had died a few months before at the age of ninety-seven, the father of ten children and the acknowledged patriarch of the Weaver family.

> In the whole course and tenor of his life, Uncle Doug suggests strongly the ideal citizen as he was contemplated, near the founding of this republic, by Thomas Jefferson. He was an agrarian, living on the soil; a primary producer creating things, not trafficking in the things that other men made. . . . In a world where so much is superficial, aimless and even hysterical, he kept a grasp upon those values which are neither old-fashioned or new-fashioned, but are central, permanent and certain in their reward. That is why we think of him as an outstanding example of the sturdy yeomanry which, though modest and self-effacing, has contributed so much to the fibre of this state.

Richard Weaver came to the University of Chicago in 1944 to teach English and rhetoric in the college; he became professor in 1957 and stayed at the university until his death in 1964 at the age of fifty-three. Before he died he had accepted a visiting professorship at Vanderbilt University which he hoped might become a permanent appointment, but for all his dislike of the city, I do not think that he

was unhappy at the University of Chicago. He was a demanding but successful teacher, much respected by his students, and he enjoyed the stimulating, challenging, if not always compatible atmosphere of the University. In 1949 he was awarded the Quantrell Prize for excellence in teaching.

Weaver was of medium height, solidly built, had strongly held opinions which his rather heavy, clearly marked features reflected. He was pleasant to be with, always courteous, never forcing his opinions on others, but he was a man, I think, who found it difficult to establish close relations with others, which doubtless contributed to his loneliness at the University of Chicago. Eliseo Vivas, who was a colleague of Weaver's before becoming a professor at Northwestern University writes of him, "One impression that grew stronger the longer I knew him was that I would never get to know him intimately. . . . He did not put you off. . . , but somehow you did not breach the reserve that kept his inwardness inviolate and inviolable."

As soon as the teaching term ended in the spring he abandoned his rather dingy, unkempt bachelor apartment in Hyde Park and set off for Weaverville, always traveling by train, difficult as it became as rail travel deteriorated—he would never fly unless there was no other choice. "You have to draw the line somewhere," he once remarked to me. Distrustful of "progress" and industrialism in general, he regarded the airplane with particular repugnance. He always insisted that his garden be plowed by horse or mule, which became increasingly difficult for his mother to arrange prior to his arrival. As far as it was possible for him to be so in our modern world, Weaver was consistent.

Weaver entered the University of Kentucky at the age of seventeen. The professors, he tells us in his characteristically modest, honest autobiographical essay, "Up From Liberalism" (*Modern Age*, vol. 3, no. 1, 21-32), were mostly "earnest souls from Middle Western universities, and many of them—especially those in economics, political science, and philosophy—were, with or without knowing it, social democrats." The university was given to the elective system, which meant that seventeen-year-old students, in effect, told the faculty what they ought to be taught. Having been given no defense against the doctrinaire position of his teachers, by the time he graduated in 1932, Weaver himself had been persuaded, as he said, "that the future was with science, liberalism, and equalitarianism, and that all opposed to these trends were people of ignorance or malevolence." In his third year he joined the Socialist Party and became secretary of the local unit, and while the socialist program had a certain appeal to him—it was then the bottom of the great depression—he soon found that he could not like the party members he met as persons—"they seemed dry, insistent people of shallow objectives."

Subsequent graduate study at Vanderbilt, where he came under the influence of the Southern Agrarians, who in 1930 had published their manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand,* and particularly of John Crowe Ransom, with whom he studied, marked a decisive turning point in his life and ended his flirtation with socialism. While he did not, at first, fully agree with these men, he liked them as persons: "They seemed to me more humane, more generous, and considerably less dogmatic than those with whom I had been associated under the opposing banner . . . the intellectual maturity and personal charm of the Agrarians were very unsettling to my then-professed allegiance."

The graduate degree in English he earned at Vanderbilt led to a teaching post at a large technical college in Texas where, as he described it, he "encountered a rampant philistinism, abetted by technology, large-scale organization, and a complacent acceptance of success as the goal of life." While driving back at the beginning of his third year "across the monotonous prairies of Texas," it suddenly dawned on him that he was under no compulsion to go back to a job that had

become distasteful to him nor to go on professing the clichés of liberalism. At the end of the year he gave up his job and "went off," as he put it, "to start my education over, being now arrived at the age of thirty."

He had used his time in Texas to read extensively in the history of the Civil War, which he continued to do during the three years he spent at Louisiana State, giving special attention to the losing side: "It is good for everyone," he wrote in justification of his decision, "to ally himself at one time with the defeated and to look at the 'progress' of history through the eyes of those who were left behind. . . . The people who emerged were human, all-too-human, but there was still the mystery of the encompassing passion which held them together, and this I have not yet penetrated. But in a dozen various ways I have come to recognize myself in the past, which is at least an important piece of self-knowledge."

In the biographical essay I have referred to, Weaver speaks of two convictions which took possession of him as a result of his studies of the Civil War: that "we live in a universe which was given to us, in the sense that we did not create it"; and that "we don't understand very much of it." Following the further experience of a world war and its consequences, he came to the conclusion, after having rejected it as a ridiculous superstition when he was a young man, that there is no concept that expresses a deeper insight into the enigma of man than that of original sin, which he defines as "a parabolical expression of the immemorial tendency of man to do the wrong thing when he knows the right thing," and finally that we must recognize evil "as a subtle, pervasive, protean force." Armed with such convictions and a firmly held view of the world arrived at after careful study and long reflection, he came to the University of Chicago in 1944 well prepared to teach English and rhetoric in the college and to hold his own in what must, at times, have seemed a rather hostile environment.

It is ironical that this Southern Agrarian, with his distrust of progress and materialism and of science as the source of truth, his rejection of liberalism and socialism, and his preference for the old, backward South to the progressive, industrial North, should have spent the productive years of his life at a university founded by John D. Rockefeller, where, not long before Weaver arrived, the first chain reaction had taken place, the event that launched the age of the atomic bomb, and in the city where fifteen years before there had been a great exposition, "A Century of Progress," celebrating the achievements of science and technology. Out of place as Weaver may have been in Chicago, the challenge and intellectual stimulation of the university undoubtedly contributed to his creative achievement.

One day in the fall of 1945, after the shooting and bombing had finally stopped and the appalling consequences of the war were becoming apparent, Weaver tells us in "Up From Liberalism," he was contemplating, from the vantage point of his office in Ingleside Hall, the actual course of events as compared with the glib promises of our wartime leaders, and wondering what it was that had gone wrong. How could it have happened, for example, that the medieval idea of chivalry, which recognized even the enemy as a man with an immortal soul and thus kept war within the bounds of civilization, could have been supplanted by total war which knows no limits and is subject to no restraint, to be followed by the demand for unconditional surrender that places the defeated at the mercy of the victor, and that, as Weaver says, "impiously puts man in the place of God by usurping unlimited right to dispose of the lives of others."

Believing as he did that the world is intelligible and that history is not accidental, nor determined by biological or economic forces, but is the result of conscious choice, he wondered if "it would not be possible to deduce from fundamental causes, the fallacies of modern life and thinking that had produced this holocaust and would insure others." To discover what went wrong and to describe its con-

sequences is the purpose and the achievement of Weaver's first book, the beginning of which goes back to those ruminations in Ingleside Hall in the fall of 1945.

By a fortunate coincidence, the director of the University of Chicago Press when Weaver submitted his manuscript, William T. Couch, was a man who by temperament and background would have been sympathetic to Weaver's unabashed attack on the accepted positions of the postwar period. Mr. Couch's enthusiasm for the book, from the standpoint of his own career, may have been ill-advised, but however that may be, the manuscript was accepted. The publisher insisted on a different title, *Ideas Have Consequences,* on the assumption that it better represented the thesis of the book than the author's *Fearful Descent.* In the fall of 1948 the book was published by the University of Chicago Press with the strong backing of its Director, who used all the resources available to him to bring the book into the center of discussion.

The thesis of the book is far-reaching and can be said to question the basic assumptions of modern life. This thesis can be easily stated: It is the triumph of the doctrine of nominalism as propounded by William of Occam in the latter part of the fourteenth century that put Western man on the wrong path. Such a doctrine had the practical result, Weaver argues,

> to banish the reality that is perceived by the intellect and to posit as reality that which is perceived by the sense. With this change in the affirmation of what is real, the whole orientation of culture takes a turn, and we are on the road to modern empiricism. . . . The denial of everything transcending experience means inevitably—though ways are found to hedge on this—the denial of truth. With the denial of objective truth there is no escape from the relativism of "man the measure of all things." . . . Thus began the "abomination of desolation" appearing today as a feeling of alienation from all fixed truth. . . . Man created in the divine image, the protagonist of a great drama in which his soul was at stake, was replaced by man the wealth-seeking and -consuming animal.

Having described the changes in the perception of reality and truth which he believed began the process of dissolution, Weaver goes on to describe its specific consequences: The doctrine of original sin makes way for belief in the innate goodness of man, hierarchy succumbs to equalitarianism, religion and faith to rationalism and science, discipline to comfort, the acceptance of the human condition as a given to belief that man is master of his own fate. Because society depends on distinction, "the most insidious idea," Weaver asserts, "to break down society is an undefined equalitarianism," which, among other things, puts into question the relationship between effort and reward. In a chapter called "The Great Stereopticon" Weaver expresses his strong feelings about the destructive influence of the press, radio, and movies (TV was then still in its infancy):

> What person taking the affirmative view of life can deny that the world served up daily by press, movie, and radio is a world of evil and negation? There is iron in our nature sufficient to withstand any fact that is present in a context of affirmation, but we cannot remain unaffected by the continued assertion of cynicism and brutality. Yet these are what the materialists in control of publicity gave us.

Dismal as all this sounds—and let us not forget that it was written shortly after the end of World War II when the prospects for the Western world seemed to be dismal in the extreme—Weaver "propounds," as he says, if not a whole solution, at least the beginnings of one. The last three chapters, therefore, are devoted to an account of the measures which he thinks would contribute to a recovery of sound values: the restoration of respect for private property, the restoration of the integrity of language, and the restoration of piety and justice as cardinal elements of social life, piety understood in the classical sense as respect for the order of being.

Property, Weaver unequivocally states, is "the last metaphysical right," metaphysical "because it does not depend on any test of social usefulness." Is it not, he

goes on to ask, "quite comforting to feel that we can enjoy one right which does not have to answer to sophistries of the world or rise and fall with the tide of opinion?" Weaver's concept of property is specific and concrete; it involves not merely claiming the right to something, but bearing the responsibility for it. For him, however, Southern Agrarian that he was, the "last metaphysical right" does not include "the kind of property brought into being by finance capitalism," which, as an abstraction, lends itself to control by the state. I will conclude Weaver's observations on property with one last challenge to the utilitarians, levelers, liberals, or whatever their name may be: "In private property there survives the last domain of privacy of any kind. Every other wall has been overthrown. Here a unique privacy remains because property has not been compelled to give a justification of the kind demanded by rationalists and calculators."

Having determined a sanctuary in private property, Weaver goes on to speak about the nature of language and its relation to order. To demonstrate the ancient belief that there is a divine element in language, Weaver speaks of "the potency ascribed to incantations, interdictions, and curses. We see it in the legal force given to an oath or a word . . . which can only mean that words in common human practice express something transcending the moment." What Weaver sought to restore, with all the eloquence at his command, was an appreciation of language as something uniquely human, as something given to man to express his highest aspirations, not as a means to deceive others, but as the binding element of society, as "a great storehouse of universal memory" and as a way "to get at a meaning beyond present meaning."

Weaver begins the chapter "Piety and Justice," the last in the book, by extending the meaning of Plato's Euthyphro from the impiety of a son toward his father to the impiety of modern man, through technology, toward nature. This impiety takes the form of believing that the demands of man take precedence over the order of nature, as we see, for example, in the destruction of the environment. But the contempt for natural order can also take other forms, one of which, Weaver believes, is "the foolish and destructive notion of the 'equality' of the sexes." He concludes his observation on this subject with the remark, "After the gentlemen went, the lady had to go too. No longer protected, the woman now has her career, in which she makes a drab pilgrimage from two-room apartment to job to divorce court." Besides learning to regard the order of nature with piety, we must also learn to regard our neighbors with piety, and, finally, the past, by which he meant history and tradition.

It is instructive, from the distance of forty years, to consider the reception given Weaver's first book when it appeared. While there were cries of outrage from the expected sources, on the whole it must be said that the book was given the serious attention it deserved. Howard Mumford Jones in the *New York Times,* as one would have anticipated, labeled it "a sincere, fanatical, and, for my money, irresponsible piece of writing"; George R. Geiger, in the *Antioch Review,* used such terms as "pompous fraud," "essentially evil," and "notorious"; Charles Frankel, in *The Nation,* criticized Weaver's "absolutist defense of the humanistic tradition"; and both the *Annals of the American Academy* and *The Christian Century* were critical of what they considered Weaver's nostalgia for the Middle Ages. The book was warmly welcomed by William A. Orton in *Commonweal* and by Charner Perry in *Ethics*—the latter remarking: "That the author's prejudices run counter to much of modern taste is helpful." Reinhold Niebuhr judged it "a profound analysis of the sickness of our culture," and Paul Tillich pronounced it "brilliantly written, daring and radical. . . . It will shock, and philosophical shock is the beginning of wisdom."

Only one other book of Weaver's was published during his lifetime, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* in 1953, which he once remarked

to me was his best and which Eliseo Vivas, whose judgment Weaver greatly respected, considered, "from a scholar's point of view . . . [his] most important contribution." The austere quality of the book may be surmised from the following observation at the beginning of the opening chapter, "The *Phaedrus* and the Nature of Rhetoric":

> Our difficulty with the *Phaedrus* may be that our interpretation has been too literal and too topical. If we will bring to the reading of it even a portion of that imagination which Plato habitually exercised, we should perceive surely enough that it is consistently, and from beginning to end, about one thing, which is the nature of rhetoric.

Weaver derives his definition of rhetoric from his discussion of the *Phaedrus:* "Rhetoric . . . consists of truth plus its artful presentation." He later remarks that "neuter discourse is a false idol" because the purpose of all, or most, discourse is to convince us of something, good or bad: The essential thing is to be aware of the rhetorical device being used.

In order to demonstrate the difference between dialectical and rhetorical argumentation, Weaver devotes the second chapter of the book to a discussion of the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, where, in 1925, John T. Scopes, a high school teacher, was tried for having violated a law recently passed by the State of Tennessee making it unlawful in any state-supported educational institution "to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine creation of man as taught in the Bible." With Clarence Darrow for the defense and William Jennings Bryan for the prosecution, the case attracted national attention, the issue being represented as science and enlightenment arrayed against fundamentalism and superstition. Weaver, however, is not concerned here with the merits of evolution or the wisdom of the law forbidding its teaching in the public schools, but rather with the manner in which the case was argued. The defense, Weaver shows, "pleading the cause of science, was forced into the role of rhetorician; whereas the prosecution, pleading the cause of the state, clung stubbornly to a dialectical position." The defense brought in expert witnesses to prove the scientific truth of evolution, but a scientific theory cannot be proved or disproved in a court of law, and this, in any case, was not the issue. It was clear that the law had been enacted by the State of Tennessee and that John T. Scopes was guilty of having violated it, and so the court decided.

The law, as Weaver said, won a victory, but the defense accomplished what it set out to do: It made the law and the point of view it represented look foolish. No matter how much this victory may have been welcomed by the forces of modernism, it was a disservice to the understanding of what the true issue really was. In his discussion of the Southern heritage in his doctoral dissertation, *The Southern Tradition at Bay,* Weaver points out that the anti-evolution laws reflected the belief that "science has not usurped the seats of the prophets," and however foolish Clarence Darrow made such a belief appear to be, it is, as Weaver said, a "continuum of history" and thus deserving of respect.

In his discussion of the various forms of argumentation—the argument from genus or definition, the argument from circumstance, the argument from consequence—Weaver uses Edmund Burke, to the distress of some of his conservative admirers, to illustrate the argument from circumstance, and, in spite of his Southern heritage and Confederate sympathies, Abraham Lincoln to illustrate the argument from definition. The argument from circumstance, in Weaver's opinion, is the least philosophical form of argument because it only attempts to measure current conditions and pressures. It is, therefore, an argument philosophically appropriate to the liberal. Weaver gives numerous examples of what he calls Burke's "strong addiction to the argument from circumstance": his great speech on "Conciliation with the American Colonies," Weaver says, "is from beginning to

end . . . an argument about policy as dictated by circumstances."

In contrast to Burke, Lincoln in his state papers and speeches habitually used the argument from definition, which Weaver believed is the higher form of argument. He gives many striking examples of Lincoln's reasoning in arriving at a position and of his method of argumentation, beginning with his stand against slavery in his debates with Douglas, which he based on the nature of man and the irrefutable fact that the Negro is a man. Weaver concludes his discussion of Lincoln with the following observation:

> The heart of Lincoln's statesmanship, indeed, lay in his perception that on some matters one has to say "Yes" or "No," that one has to accept an alternative to the total exclusion of the other, and that any weakness in being thus bold is a betrayal.

This may be true, but like every other rigid position it is true only within limits. If Lincoln had been less unbending in his conduct of the war, had been willing to consider the circumstances of Southern society, some of the worst excesses could have been avoided and eventual reconciliation made less difficult. A rigidly logical position is all very well, but we live in the world as it is. Edmund Burke states the issue with wonderful clarity:

> A statesman, never losing sight of principles, is to be guided by circumstances; and judging contrary to the exigencies of the moment he may ruin his country forever.

Having defined his subject, Weaver devotes the rest of *The Ethics of Rhetoric* to a masterful study of the nature of rhetoric and its relation to civilized discourse. In the chapter "Grammatical Categories" he describes the characteristics of the various parts of speech and demonstrates how the proper use of words and of sentence structure adds to the effectiveness of writing: He compares the use of the adverb by Thomas Carlyle with that of Henry James. And to show how effective the proper use of the word "and" can be, Weaver refers to its use in the King James Bible to join long sequences of verses, giving one "the feeling that the story is confirmed and inevitable. . . . When this pattern is dropped, as it is in a recent 'American' version of the Bible, the text collapses into a kind of news story." There is a demanding but rewarding chapter, "Milton's Heroic Prose," which makes a sharp contrast to the chapter that follows, "The Rhetoric of the Social Sciences," a rhetoric, it becomes clear, which is neither heroic nor effective.

The last chapter, "Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric," includes Weaver's description of "God terms" and "Devil terms," words or phrases which through use or association have acquired, or have been given, a force which goes beyond their original meaning. As examples of God terms he cites "progress," "fact," "science," "modern." An example of a "Devil term" is "prejudice," which, Weaver says, is an "uncontested term"—and who in public life would admit to being prejudiced?—that "disarms the opposition by making all positional judgments reprehensible." The present use of "racist" serves the same purpose. God terms, Weaver asserts, still have some relationship to their original meaning, to what he calls their "referent," but there is another term, to which he gives the name "charismatic," whose referents are virtually impossible to discover because "it is the nature of the charismatic term to have a power which is not derived but which is in some mysterious way given." Weaver's rhetorical sensibility led him to believe that one of the principal charismatic terms of our time is "freedom." Our political leaders, he goes on to say, make the greatest demands in the name of freedom, in the form of military service, higher taxes, abridgement of rights—one need only think only of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms"—while carefully avoiding any attempt to clarify what it refers to. Another major charismatic term, in his opinion, is "democracy," which people seem to resist any effort to define for fear that to define it would deprive it of its charisma.

Except for a textbook, *A Rhetoric and Handbook, Ideas Have Consequences* and *The Ethics of Rhetoric* were the only books of Weaver published during his lifetime. A third book, *Visions of Order,* was in manuscript when he died and appeared the following year; although he had made arrangements for its publication, he had no opportunity to make final corrections. As in his previous books, his concern is with the disintegration of society, and in making his case he further develops many of the themes he had alluded to in his previous books. In considering the prospect of the total destructiveness of war made possible by the development of modern science, Weaver refers again to the example of chivalry, by means of which, in a period of comparable moral chaos, it was possible to put a limit on destructive impulses. All this, it is clear, is another aspect of what he considers to be the destructive nature of the idea of equality, about which he has more to say in the chapters "The Image of Culture" and "Status and Function." By its very nature, he believed, culture is exclusive. There can be no such thing as a "democratic" culture. "Without the power to reject that which does not understand or acknowledge its center of force, it would disintegrate."

One of the strongest chapters in the book is "The Cultural Role of Rhetoric." Just as he used the Scopes trial in his earlier book to demonstrate the differences between rhetorical and dialectical argumentation, in *Visions of Order* he goes back to the trial of Socrates to illustrate his contention that dialectic, when used in disregard of accepted beliefs and traditions, can be destructive:

> By turning his great dialectical skill upon persons and institutions, Socrates could well have produced the feeling that he was an enemy of the culture which the Greeks had produced. . . . The trial itself can be viewed as a supremely dramatic incident in the far longer and broader struggle between rationalism on the one hand and poetry and rhetoric (and belief) on the other.

And to demonstrate further the place of rhetoric he adds:

> The triumph and continuance of Christian culture attests the power of rhetoric in holding men together and maintaining institutions. It is generally admitted that there is a strong element of Platonism in Christianity. But if Plato provided the reasoning, Paul and Augustine provided the persuasion. What emerged from this could not be withstood even by the power of Rome.

The subject of the final chapter of *Visions of Order* is the imminence of "such a dark night of the mind" as man has experienced in those periods in the past when he seemed to lose sight of the knowledge of his own nature he had previously won. One of the things man has learned about himself, Weaver says, is that he is a creature of choice, which realization gives him a sense of his own worth and dignity. These two qualities, he concludes, give man the capability to create a rational civilization. Now Weaver was strongly of the opinion, and this is the theme of his concluding chapter, that the most serious threat to the concept of man as a creature enjoying the privilege of making choices, and therefore of freedom, comes from science, and in various guises. From the realization that the earth is not the center of the universe, but a miniscule part of it, it has been concluded that the fate of man is of little moment. The consequence of evolution, as Weaver puts it, is "to place man squarely in the animal kingdom." Finally, having gone this far, the next step is to make man entirely subject to material causality. "If his being and shape were due to natural laws, which could be studied as phenomena, why not account for the whole of him, including his famous free will, in the same way?" The effect of this diminishing of man in his own estimation can be clearly seen, Weaver believed, in his representation in literature and religion: "If the story of man was but the story of an animal, was it really deserving of the sublime treatment it had been given in religion and literature?"

Weaver's answer to all this is to question

the validity of the Darwinian hypothesis, which he does in a number of ways, the most convincing of which in his mind, apparently, is the mystery of language, which cannot be explained, Weaver believed, in any other way than as a gift. His criticism of the theory of evolution must have been convincing to him, but it did not convince his old friend and colleague Eliseo Vivas who, in an otherwise very positive review in *Modern Age* (vol. 8, no. 3, 307-10) called his attack on evolution "An embarrassing performance . . . it would have taken far more science and philosophy than he had at his command to undermine successfully the work of Darwin and his heirs."

From the standpoint of the strict philosopher, Vivas may well be correct. But it should also be said that the basis of Weaver's attack on evolution is not philosophy but instinct, and as Vivas remarks in the same review: ". . . back of his judgments there is something for which I have no other term than 'instinct'. . . . His arguments were not always the best, but the attitudes from which his rejections and acceptances issued were for the most part unerring." For the attitude from which his rejection of evolution issued we have not far to seek: It is clearly stated in Weaver's first published essay, "The Older Religiousness in the South," which is included in the *Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver:*

> Nature is a vast unknown; in the science of nature there are constantly appearing emergents which, if allowed to affect spiritual and moral verities, would destroy them by rendering them dubious, tentative, and conflicting. It is therefore imperative in the eyes of the older religionists that man have for guidance in this life a body of knowledge to which the "facts" of natural discovery are either subordinate or irrelevant. This body is the "rock of ages," firm in the vast sea of human passion and error.

While Weaver was not a church-goer, I have no doubt that the "body of knowledge" he referred to was one of the givens of his view of the world.

For all his foreboding about the imminence of "a dark night of the mind," Weaver believed that our best hope lies not in science or politics, but in culture, and that "literature is the keystone of culture." This is so, he said, not only because literature is the most various, searching, and complete of the forms of culture, but because "it is the form in which an intellectual culture stores the ideas from which society derives its rhetoric of cohesion and compulsion."

Besides his doctoral dissertation, *The Southern Tradition at Bay,* three other books were published after Weaver's death, all collections of essays: *Life Without Prejudice* in 1965, *Language is Sermonic* in 1970, and the *Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver* in 1987. The eight essays included in *Life Without Prejudice* include many of Weaver's most strongly held convictions, which, presented in the concise form of the essay, are sharply and succinctly expressed. "Life without prejudice," he says in the title essay, "were it ever to be tried, would soon reveal itself to be a life without principle. . . . For prejudices . . . are often built-in principles. They are the extract which the mind has made of experience." In the essay "Education and the Individual" he makes the following observation, which on reflection will be seen to be completely in opposition to the position of "progressive" education:

> Education thus has a major responsibility to what we think of as objectively true. But it also has a major responsibility to the person. We may press this even further and say that education must regard two things as sacred: the truth and the personality that is to be brought into contact with it. No education can be civilizing and humane unless it is a respecter of person.

In another essay, "Two Types of American Individualism," he compares what he considers to be the socially irresponsible individualism of the New Englander Henry David Thoreau with the more realistic, principled individualism of the irascible Southern eccentric John Ran-

dolph. It is not surprising that Russell Kirk considers this to be the "liveliest essay" in this collection, nor that Eliseo Vivas, in his introduction, remarks that it contains "some essays that fully and completely express the man and his thought, . . . [and] may rank as his best book."

The four books of which I have tried to give some idea reflect the rhetorician and the University of Chicago professor who had thought deeply about the social crisis of our time, its causes and what might be done about it. The *Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver* reflect the Southerner whose attitude and loyalty to the South are most clearly represented, perhaps, by the position of Southern Agrarianism, which, he said in the chapter "The Tennessee Agrarians," was "one of the few effective challenges to a monolithic culture of unredeemed materialism." The South, it must be said, with the mechanization of cotton farming and its industrial development, is far more industrialized now and, doubtless, more materialistic than it was when the Southern Agrarians issued their manifesto in 1930. Even if he had lived to see what has happened since then, Weaver could not have given up the belief that the sort of change the Agrarians strove for was possible. At the end of the same chapter he writes:

> There have been revolutions in human affairs which appear miraculous in the light of the conditions which preceded them. Ultimately it is the human psyche which determines the kind of world we live in, and history is marked by radical changes of phase which could undermine even so seemingly impregnable a thing as our modern scientific-technological order.

The truth of the matter was that in making a case for the kind of life the Agrarians espoused, as Weaver himself realized, they had become intellectuals, and in so doing, had isolated themselves. "The South no longer had a place for them, and the flight to the North completed an alienation long in process." In writing this he may well have been thinking of the boy from Weaverville, North Carolina, who, after the University of Kentucky, Vanderbilt, and Louisiana State, ended up condemned to earn his living, as he said, "in the most brutal of cities," even though Chicago gave him the intellectual stimulus and the platform he may not have found in the South.

The doctoral dissertation that resulted from Weaver's thorough study of the "losing side" was discovered several years after his death and published in 1968 as *The Southern Tradition at Bay.* George Core of the University of Georgia and M. E. Bradford of the University of Dallas carefully, and I am sure, lovingly, edited the manuscript; and to make its Southern origin unmistakable, Donald Davidson wrote an appreciative foreword for what he called his former student's "wise, good-tempered book." It was Weaver's purpose to discover what it was about the South that sets it apart and makes it a distinct region, what it fought for in the war which Weaver thought of as its War of Independence, and then in his study of the postwar period, the time euphemistically called "Reconstruction," how it was that the South, despite defeat and the humiliation of military occupation, was able to resist spiritual disintegration. It is not a book about events, but rather an attempt to discover what people believed, what the "encompassing passion" was, as Weaver called it, that held the South together through four long years of war. For one brought up in a Northern community, where the righteousness of the Civil War as a war to free the slaves and save the Union was accepted as an article of faith, where, in school, to commemorate Lincoln's birthday, one sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "Marching Through Georgia," it is an illuminating and rewarding experience to read Weaver's account of how it appeared from the other side.

Richard Weaver was not the sort of professor whose picture appears on the cover of *Time* or whose books receive rave reviews in the *New York Times,* but his work has had a profound influence which will continue. *Ideas Have Consequences* is

one of the three books, with F. A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (1944) and Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* (1953), which provided the intellectual basis for the modern conservative movement. A program of scholarships, the Weaver Fellowships, demonstrates the influence of Weaver by the quality and achievement of the students the program has sponsored, and the Rockford Institute has named one of the two Ingersoll Prizes it gives annually for contributions to literature and scholarly letters for Richard Weaver, the other for T. S. Eliot.

How much he was recognized or how highly regarded he may have been at the University of Chicago I have no way of knowing, but he was much respected as a teacher. In a letter written in 1959 to Russell Kirk he mentions that he was Chairman of the English course in the college and had been invited to teach the course the next year in the history of Western civilization. On the other hand, an old friend and former colleague of Weaver's told me that when the Dean gave him the Quantrell Prize for excellence in teaching he remarked, "Weaver, I hope you will take the money and go some place else."

Although *Ideas Have Consequences* was a commercial success and, however much it may have disturbed some people, was recognized as a book of intellectual distinction, the University of Chicago Press never published another book by Weaver. The head of the press who published Weaver's first book, William T. Couch, was rudely dismissed several years later, but the press has kept his book in print. When Weaver died, Robert E. Streeter, Professor in the Department of English and Dean of the Division of the Humanities said of him: "Richard M. Weaver for two decades gave University of Chicago undergraduates an understanding of what it means to think, speak, and to write with full responsibility."

The Richard Weaver I knew as a friend, not as a professor, was a modest, unassuming man of great integrity. He was rather reticent, but always good company and pleasant to be with. During the last winter or two of his life several of us who were involved with the quarterly *Modern Age*, which was then published in Chicago, would meet on Friday afternoons in the modest office of the magazine to look over the manuscripts that had come in and to talk about the problems associated with such a venture—what might be done to make it more appealing to the readers we wanted to reach, whether we should try to obtain advertising, which books we should review, in short, what we should do to give it substance. Weaver always seemed to enjoy such occasions, took a lively part in the conversation, and added to the pleasure we all took in each other's company. It was on a Monday following such an occasion that I received the sad news of his death.

As his life and work make clear, Weaver had strongly held convictions and made no concessions to the intellectual fashions of the day, however much his position in the academic community might have been helped by his doing so. He gave freely of himself in his teaching and in his willingness to write for publications he respected and to lecture to groups he felt were serious, irrespective of the honorarium or prestige involved. In his essay "Agrarianism in Exile," he remarks that no man saves himself alone: "He saves himself, if at all, by bringing the community around to right reason." This Richard Weaver tried manfully to do, and with more success, it seems fair to say, than he himself realized.